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AUTHOR Bane, Mary E.
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ABSTRACT

Since today's education is strictly white middle class with little diversion to other ethnic cultures, the Mexican American student finds that it is not relevant to his being or his present day situation. Compounding the problem is that the Mexican American has to deal with the existence of two cultures--one of his parents which he maintains at home and in all his social encounters, and his own, the American one, which he has to learn in order to keep up with the school system. According to Dr. George I. Sanchez, "there is a lack of motivation which originates in the schools 'where the child, in the process of gaining an education, internalizes attitudes of inferiority, futility, and frustration'." Robert Theobald sees today's education as a training experience instead of an educated one. He says education is "the process of providing each individual with the capacity to develop his potential to the full". The education process must then involve students in decision making, in choosing what type of learning experience they will become involved with. However, the Mexican American will not be able to enter the world designed by Theobald until educational systems recognize the problem and work to help them meet the future. Educational systems have to meet them halfway in humanistic terms, culturally aware of what the Mexican American can contribute to the society. (NQ)

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EDUCATION FUTURISM AND THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN STUDENT

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Dr. John Pulliam

Mary E. Bane
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THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN STUDENT

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EDUCATION FUTURISM AND

THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN STUDENT

I sat in classes this semester listening to all the great changes to come in the educational system of the future. I learned of the many innovations now seen in education.

Thoughts of Robert Theobald and Ivan Illich and their concepts of future education sounded interesting and challenging and at the same time strange and frightening. I tried many times to gear my thoughts into future years and see if such futuristic concepts could possibly work in today's society. Yes, they could but - ....

A month or so ago I received a call from a very dear friend, a medical doctor from New Mexico now retired and working on personal projects throughout the state. A long time promotor of reading, he worked very hard to improve the conditions of his small city library into one that would attract the whole community and be utilized by all age groups. He feels that the next thing to starving a child is not allowing him to read. A bit extreme perhaps, but not in New Mexico where the socio-economic status is not very high. He goes on in his conversation

to tell me that he is in the process of collecting and buying as many books of all types to give to various communities in New Mexico without libraries at all.

A young teacher from his city came home over the holidays and asked him that she be given books to take to her school in Tierra Amarilla, in northern New Mexico, because there was no library for kids to get more information. A lady in Magdalena, New Mexico, opens her home two days a week to kids who want to read books from her own library. This lady happens to travel quite a lot in her professional career and in her travels she collected many books which she now offers to the community for their enjoyment.

On a trip to my home in New Mexico recently, I am told by several professors to consider returning to New Mexico as they are now in great need for bilingual teachers in elementary levels. They are finding more and more children who are not fluent in English by the time they start grade one, and due to the beauracratic educational system, the children are not held back, but processed through the system. This only leads to the drop out rate increasing.

The need to expose kids of other cultures to more language and to more ideas and knowledge through books seems to indicate to me that if and when Theobald and Illich's plan went into effect, someone somewhere in this country will be totally eliminated from any normal existence in that society.

We do not have to go into Theobald's future at all to see this problem. Today's innovations in education attempted everywhere are not in reality taking in all the considerations of the child of another culture. How can these children get into the main stream of society if the very basics of knowledge are not with them?

I ask the following and wonder. How can the educational system let these kids know that they can "get ahead" if the schools are not prepared to meet them half way and help them? Why is the minority student drop out rate so high? What do the futurists have in mind for the illerate Mexican American adult who dropped out of an educational system and feels he has failed completely in life? Why can't the educational institutions see that if they have failed to teach a minority student something of worth, that they are only promoting a future community of non-educated minority adults? What do the futurists do with adults who cannot read, barely write and speak English so poorly they cannot get decent jobs and through poor social education are producing children into this type of environment? Is this the America that now exists - masses of 8th grade drop outs?

I see no bright future for them. I can't even think in global terms as the futurists do for any future existence when I see the problems within the boundries of the United States.

It is not only the Mexican-American in trouble. There are great numbers involved, the black child, the American Indian, some still in reservations tied strongly to past traditions and language, the Eskimo child, and the Appalachian child who has not yet caught up with today's progress off the mountain. I relate more to the problem of the Mexican-American because I am one of them, one of the few who perhaps escaped the vicious cycle that makes today's educational system a failure. I am filled with questions that cannot be answered and that I alone could not even begin to solve.

Today's education is strictly white middle class with little diversion to other ethnical cultures. It is not capturing the whole spectrum of the population. It is so traditional and structured that even the middle class white student is finding it hard to cope with. His problem is that it is not relevant to his future, his generation; too, the Mexican-American finds it not relevant to his being, his present day situation.

Illich stresses that schools do more harm to students who fail or could not "make the system" than if the student ever came to school. "Schools have alienated man from his learning. He does not enjoy going to school. If he is poor, he does not get the reputed benefits,..... if he is sensitive, he feels deep conflict between what is and what is supposed to be".(1)

Today we are programming students to be able to perform a set of tasks once he leaves school. He is so guided and socially brainwashed so inconspicuously that the end result is more members to perpetuate the society we now have. The educational institution has not taught him to think for himself, to solve problems, to think of new ways to better society nor to plan for his future. He is as Theobald would say trained and not educated. This again is the middle class student. The Mexican-American is a few steps further behind. He is dealing with the existence of two cultures - one of his parents that he must maintain at home and in all his social encounters and the other one, his own culture, the American one, that he has to learn in order to keep up with the school system.

It is slowly diminishing in many southwestern states, but there are still many communities that maintain a strong Mexican/Spanish influence and it is harder for the child to manage in a white school system and then leave those values behind and return to his other world at home. The school system fails this student and soon he drops out. Here this student has not even had the chance to think about the future and the new changes he will have to adjust to in a changing society.

Bruner states that our practice in education, both in and out of school, assures uneven distribution not only of

knowledge but also of competence to profit from knowledge. "It does so by limiting and starving the capabilities of the children of the poor by leading them into failure until they are convinced that it is not worth their while to think about school-like things".[2] Illich feels the same about what schools do for those students who cannot make it. He feels that when a student finally drops out, all the system has done for him was to label him "drop out".

Today's Mexican-American problem is even greater. During the Black Movement or revolution, which did bring about some changes within the education system, the unit of the blacks was stronger than the unity seen among Mexican-American groups. They all had a common ground to stand on - color, poverty, same degree of discrimination throughout the country, and the same beliefs.

The Mexican-American in northern New Mexico certainly feels different from those in southern New Mexico culturally. For some reason of pride or shame, the thought throughout that state is that the true Spanish Castillian linage remains in the north and the more Indian or Metizo linage remains in the south. A fallacy as there are no more pure Castillian families in New Mexico - only the actions remain. The way the northern New Mexican farms or carried out his daily life is certainly not the same as the southern New Mexican who has a greater influence from the nearby Mexican border.

The same goes for the several million Chicanos-residing around the Chicago area. There they have lost much of the old fashion Indian-Mexican tradition and have picked up an inner city barrio type existence and the problems that go along with that environment. Same goes for the Chicanos that follow the movement of Cesar Chavez and the union for grape pickers or farm workers. That particular group may be first or second generation American. The social, economical and educational problems they carry cannot be compared to those in New Mexico, Colorado or Arizona.

The Mexican-American in Texas has been the true "nigger" of the Mexican-American movement. He has been outwardly discriminated for greater than any other member of his race. Things are slowly changing but in some counties kids are still punished in school if they are caught speaking Spanish on the playground. Health, Education, and Welfare has for many years classified them as "whites" but when it comes to employment they lose their color. Education for Texan Chicano has been more of a problem. Since the state borders Mexico, there is a stronger family tie to old traditions. In many cases there is an extended family still living in Mexico. The Chicano and Texas politics has been one that never blended. Now more and more communities are electing Chicano representation. Texas is also more aware of the educational needs for bilingual/bicultural children.

Rudolfo "Corkey" Gonzales has done alot for the Chicano movement starting in Colorado in which there is also a division of thought among the Mexican-Americans living there. The educational problems for all these groups are different.

In 1942 Ruth Martinez,[3] a graduate of Claremont College in California attempted to investigate the problem of acculturation of the Mexican-Americans in that community. She took a group of former Claremont graduates who had "made it" and tried to find out why they did and why the other Mexican-Americans didn't. This group had graduated ten years previously and now had offsprings starting the educational rung. She investigates the socio-economic past of these students. These were the children of many Mexicans who came to California to work the citrus farms. These were proud farm hands and had the attitude of improving themselves therefore their children, those studied in her thesis, were proud first generation Americans who tried and in some cases succeeded assimilating into the society of that time.

These kids met with some discrimination but for some strange reason the community was unique. The uniqueness was that for the most part the teachers cared and made extra effort to reach these kids. In all of Ms. Martinez' study many of the "successful" kids gave credit to teachers for their start. They also, in their assimilation lost much of the old folk ways. These kids are probably the parents of the next generation who became bad bilingualsthey could not speak either English or Spanish well. Also they were

in the midstream of society as opposed to the mainstream. They had no identity. They are the ones that became ashamed of their parents for trying to hide what they really were but can't identify with the Mexican culture themselves. Assimilation does bring about problems.

Problems like this and worse are seen throughout the United States. The educational system is not yet ready to meet them. In the states where the Mexican-American population is abundant, colleges are starting to pick up Health, Education, and Welfare grants for Chicano doctoral programs in many areas of education. They are having a difficult time finding Mexican-Americans who qualify for doctoral programs as few make it to the undergraduate level.

New Mexico and Colorado universities are offering cultural awareness classes to prepare teachers. Educational institutions have got to become culturally aware of the child they are receiving into the system. Doctor George I. Sanchez, late professor at the University of Texas, once told a group in California that "the Mexican child was not a problem because he came to school speaking Spanish; the real problem was that no one in the school could understand him.(4) He spoke strongly on Mexican-American education and the need for it. He stated that when "Juanito" comes to school speaking Spanish it is hoped that someone be there who understands him. Juanito does have problems but language is not one of them. He can be a gifted child with the gift of tongues. He can be tri-

lingual as Doctor Sanchez feels he is already bilingual speaking an Indian dialect and Spanish.

Today's education system is hurting the Mexican-American states and Mexican-American educators. He feels there is a lack of motivation which originates in the schools "where the child, in the process of gaining an education, internalizes attitudes of inferiority, futility, and frustration."(5) To this system Silberman describes schools as grim, joyless places where students are compelled to attend. The education systems offers no acceptance of his past. With these feelings he is segregated from the group, but this segregation or alienation is self-imposed in many cases. He can't identify with the Anglo-American side nor with the Mexican-American; he can't give himself completely to either side so he withholds himself from both. The school should then give him a sense of dignity and self-respect. In any type of educational study, children with those qualities achieve rather high in school.

It is difficult for a bilingual child to assimilate. By being bilingual he is participating in the two cultures actively with his language. American schools however, in many instances, pressure the child to abandon his folk culture while on the other hand he is encouraged by members of his group to ignore the Anglo ways and retain the old ways. Not only Mexican-Americans face this problem, the Orientals in California and the Italians in the east have seen this problem.

The Mexican-American has many problems yet to solve. Many groups have strong familial or traditional ties to the country of Mexico. Others are third or fourth generation Mexican-American and identify only bilingually. Yet many are strongly ethnocentric but have blended into the Anglo society. They call themselves Chicanos, Latinos, Mexican-Americans, Spanish-American, Hispanos and many other names and all their plights are varied so one can easily see why there has not been a Mexican-American rebellion like that seen with the Black movement.

At the present time these problems are slowly being realized but at the cost of many previous students. ERIC/CRESS (Education Resource Information Center/Center for Rural Education and Small Schools) houses much information on Chicano or Mexican-American education.

ERIC offers much information on the educational efforts being made in the Southwest. There all types of methods are given for the teaching of the bilingual bicultural child. Many hours have been spent reading ERIC microfisch for other classes only to come to the conclusion that a lot is written on the problem of the Mexican-American but little on the success of the educational system to meet this problem.

Theobald foresees new dramatic changes in education. He does not go too much to the extreme like many other futurists. He feels that education will not be the way we now have it. Today's education is most a training experience instead of an educated one. Theobald says we are not teaching our students to be able to cope with oncoming changes but how to get along with the existing problem we now have.

Education says Theobald is "the process of providing each individual with the capacity to develop his potential to the full".(6) However, today's education is the action where we provide a set of "hard and fast rules which can be applied to a given range of situations but do not permit further development of skills."(7) On the other hand a person who has been educated will be able to accept and adapt to change.

The education process must then involve students in decision making, in choosing what type of learning experience they will become involved with. The author goes on to say we must be able to provide as many educational styles as we can get to encourage as much diversity as possible, but we have got to stop "training" students and begin "educating" them. We have got to provide a learning which is relevant to the time and which permits us to change our perceptions about the nature of the world in which we live.

Theobald feels that the power of the future is information. He speaks of "sapiential authority" as what will be in the

future that is "authority resulting from the individual's knowledge of the particular field under discussion and acceptance by the others involved of this authority".(8) Since he sees the future as a complete turn about of what we have today, our educational system will not be one of schools as they are today, but of learning sites in various locales of the world. Here is where these information authorities on certain subjects will be located. To these places one will come to learn and share information.

The changes involved in an informative world will be one that for the most part today's world could not handle. Scientifically, education, not as we know it today, will involve accurate movement of information, it will require parts of the system to willfully bring about change when change is needed and it will also require that no part of the system try to take over the rest of the system. Humanistically this will demand honesty, responsibility, and humility.(9)

"The purpose of futurism in education is not to create elegantly complex, well-ordered, accurate images of the future, but to help learners cope with real-life crises, opportunities and perils, states Toffler; he goes on to say that it (education) is to strengthen the individual's practical ability to anticipate and adapt to change whether through invention, informed aquiescence or through intelligent resistence".(10) Here is where Illich's "benign inequality" idea steps in. Schools are not preparing the student for his future world he will have to live in.

Instead it is just reproducing copies of the previous generation in mental capacities. That may be extreme in statement as one should realize that our advances in science and technology far exceeds that of one generation ago.

Bruner feels that for a future society we will have to train individuals not for the performance of routine activities that can be done better by devices but "to train their individual talents for research and development" (11) which cannot be done by the computer.

The future of education also deals with a more humanistic aspect. Awareness of the individual next to us will be the important thing. Our society is no longer the most powerful country as we have seen by our recent fuel and monetary crisis. We no longer can hold atomic power over any nation as a threat. War is not the answer anymore as it would only put an end to mankind. Communication is the next thing for maintaining world peace. Communication is what the future of education will strive for also. Communication then will mean having to take off the social mask so many wear and get to know those around one who will have to work conjointly for the settlement of society.

Humanism is not new. It is one of the movements of the past but as all other movements something better replaced it in the educational system. Maybe it wasn't needed at the time and more subject center education was - just the same it was replaced. In order to live in a global society with all nations humanism is now needed.

Bruner states that one of the requirements for the future is just that. He calls it the "performance of 'unpredictable services'."(12) He goes on to say that these "unpredictable services" are those that man can do better than a computer - that of being human. He includes the role of teacher, parent, assistant, stimulator, rehabilitator, the physician, the friend or that range of people that increase the richness of individual respond to other individuals.

Alvin Toffler in his book Future Shock saw friends as not the friend that Bruner describes. His future existence is so extreme that friends will not have that humanistic value as we see it today, but it will be a pooling of the minds for the need to survive.

Educational institutions are just working on the basic humanistic concept-awareness of the person and their needs.

Innovation in education has somewhat of a futuristic connotation. These are being designed for the student to prepare him to meet his future since the traditional systems are not succeeding.

Schools are now opened to students who want an informal mode of learning - learning as it is needed with no pressure; nongraded schools - in hopes of removing that ABC stigma society so highly regards; student designed curriculum - whereby a student designs his own course of study, selecting what he feels is relevant to him. Individualized education is also a new offering. Here the teacher can design the course taught to be accomplished by the student in given steps. The student takes the course in the time span he can, accomplishing it as his own pace. No two students may be at the same place at the same time. They can seek a one-to-one basis with the teacher when needed. A computer can design this method. It can assign a student a given lesson to be done at a given time. Upon completion an evaluation is done - if goal is accomplished, the next step is then given. There are also computer taught classes. Lessons are presented and evaluations are done on the computer. The "open" classroom is now a popular method.

These are all known as alternative education. Other alternatives are core instruction given one part of the day for the student and the other part the students work for pay or volunteers his time at some civic area. Apprenticeships are now offered in hospitals, industries, and business. This allows a

student to decide for himself what he wants from an education.

Allowing the student to chose his curriculums gives the student a feeling of responsibility. This also allows the student to design his future to plan for his needs and to be able to solve his problems. "Attempting to solve real-life problems, action learning done in the context of a goal-sharing group, trains participants in decisional skills and begins to develop an understanding that their decisions do count - that personal decisions can have important consequences".(13)

The ultimate purpose of the study of the future is to help people create a better life for themselves and for this what is needed is control.

How does the M/A fit in the future educational system? An alternative education route has got to be taken. A closer investigation should be done to see why the traditional system is not meeting the needs of students. A closer look at academic relevance must be taken.

"Adolescents who foresee themselves becoming members of the manual working class see no clear relation between what they are doing in school and their future occupational status."(14)

Of the 13 million poor who live in metropolitan areas, one-third are Black, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Oriental or American Indian. By 1985 the number of whites in central cities will have declined while the "Poverty-Prone" non whites will have almost doubled(15) this means the inner-city schools are faced with even bigger problems.

There is definite need for reform in education. Corwin tends to believe that declining public confidence in the education organization will support demand for reform. "There is a shifting balance of power within the society that is breaking down old monopolies over education and the increased power of ethnic and racial minorities in the central cities[16] that would indicate there is a chance for better educational programs for Mexican-American. The Mexican-American will not be able to enter the world designed by Theobald until educational systems recognize the problem and work to help them meet the future. "Education must no longer strike on exclusive posture of neutrality and objectivity ..... It must share the process of education with the learner".[17]

Educational institutions must ask themselves who the M/A is: He is a Human Being with the same hopes that the rest have, the same fears, same drives, same desires, same concerns and same abilities. He wants the same chance to be an individual.

The most fatal error of all, however, is the failure to ask the questions that the giants of other movements have kept at the center of their concern: what is education for? What kind of human beings and what kind of society do we want to produce? What knowledge is of most worth.[18]

As I have stated in the beginning there are many questions I have and many problems that I cannot begin to solve.

I have tried to present today's Mexican-American situation and relate it to the future thoughts of many educators.

There are many articles written on Mexican-American education, much attention given to methods used at the present time but little on how the educational system is preparing them to meet the future society we soon face. Some how there is a large gap between today and tomorrow and I am afraid it may not be sealed in time.

The educational system must meet the Mexican-American halfway. They have to meet them in humanistic terms, culturally aware of what the Mexican-American can contribute to the society. The Mexican-American is the largest linguistic minority group - about 70% of the total non-English speaking are Spanish speaking. The educational institutions should start to offer an education that could help the Mexican-American adjust to this society before a social revolt forces them to reform. Educational systems are never geared for change until a social upheaval forces them change yet they are the institutions set aside to teach us to function in the existing society.

I am not fatalistic as I have seen some programs in action that are working but much more work is needed. There is hope and the Mexican-American will prepare for his future although he is present oriented, there is hope.

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